A LEARNING ALBERTA

Dialogue and Direction

INFORMATION PACKAGE FOR DISCUSSIONS

A Learning Alberta: Framing the Challenge

September – November 2005

Alberta
Advanced Education

A Learning Alberta
Steering Committee

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THE LEARNING ALBERTA PROCESS

Introduction

On becoming Minister of Advanced Education, the Honourable Dave Hancock took immediate steps to involve a full range of learning stakeholders in setting new directions for advanced education in Alberta.

This action reflected the Government of Alberta's recognition that advanced education and knowledge use are the foundations of our province's future. This is also recognized in the Government's 20-Year Strategy, Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise; the Value-Added Strategy, Sustaining Tomorrow's Prosperity; the Rural Development Strategy, A Place to Grow; and the Skills Investment Strategy.

The First Step - A Window of Opportunity

Minister Hancock held a series of Stakeholder Roundtables in January and February 2005, which asked institutional leaders, community-based educators, literacy groups, Aboriginal community leaders, business, industry and apprenticeship and industry training stakeholders, Alberta's educational consortia and others to present their views on where advanced education in Alberta should be 20 years from now. The Minister also asked what steps would be necessary to get there in the next three to five years and what immediate issues must be dealt with to place Alberta on the right path.

The report from these Roundtables, A Window of Opportunity www.alearningalberta.gov.ab.ca helped to frame Bill 1, the *Access to the Future Act*, and identified the need for a forward-looking and durable policy framework to guide advanced education in the years ahead.

Roundtable Stakeholders said:

- First and foremost Alberta needs a strategic vision for advanced education.
- We must grasp the opportunity to create a system for advanced education in Alberta that will lead the world in the 21st century.
- More investment is required, but far more than dollars is needed. Alberta must design an integrated "advanced learning system" that fits the emerging character and needs of this dynamic century.

- The advanced learning system in Alberta must have leadership and a capacity for foresight, vision, inspiration and encouragement. This system must service the whole person, community, and society.

- We must acknowledge the tremendous benefits of advanced learning, not just for the economy, but for the tangible improvements it brings to the lives of Albertans.

- Funding for education must be seen as an investment, not only as an expenditure.

- Tomorrow's advanced learning system must recognize the diverse character, needs and ambitions of Albertans.

- It must support the resources available in communities and regions as well as in urban centres.

- The power of new technologies must be harnessed to achieve the best learning system possible.

The Next Step - Creating a Policy Framework for *A Learning Alberta*

In June 2005, the Minister established a Steering Committee to lead a comprehensive review of the province's advanced learning system called *A Learning Alberta: Framing the Challenge*. This committee was asked to look at best practices, current research, and input from Albertans in order to set a vision and new ideas for advanced education in the province – a vision that recognizes both institutional and community-based learning opportunities.

The Steering Committee is leading a discussion process this fall which is reviewing, discussing and influencing the key components of a proposed policy framework for *A Learning Alberta*. This process will conclude with a Minister's Forum on November 1 and 2, 2005 in Edmonton.

The *A Learning Alberta* discussions provide several channels for input, including:

On-Line Access: *Albertans are invited to give their views and responses at www.alearningalberta.gov.ab.ca.*

MLA Consultations: *MLAs are encouraged to hold local discussions in their constituencies.*

Regional Discussions: *Five regional discussion groups with a cross section of stakeholders will be held in Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge during September and October.*

Dialogues with Aboriginal Communities: *Discussions with leaders representing the diversity of Aboriginal communities will be held in Calgary and Edmonton.*

A LEARNING ALBERTA
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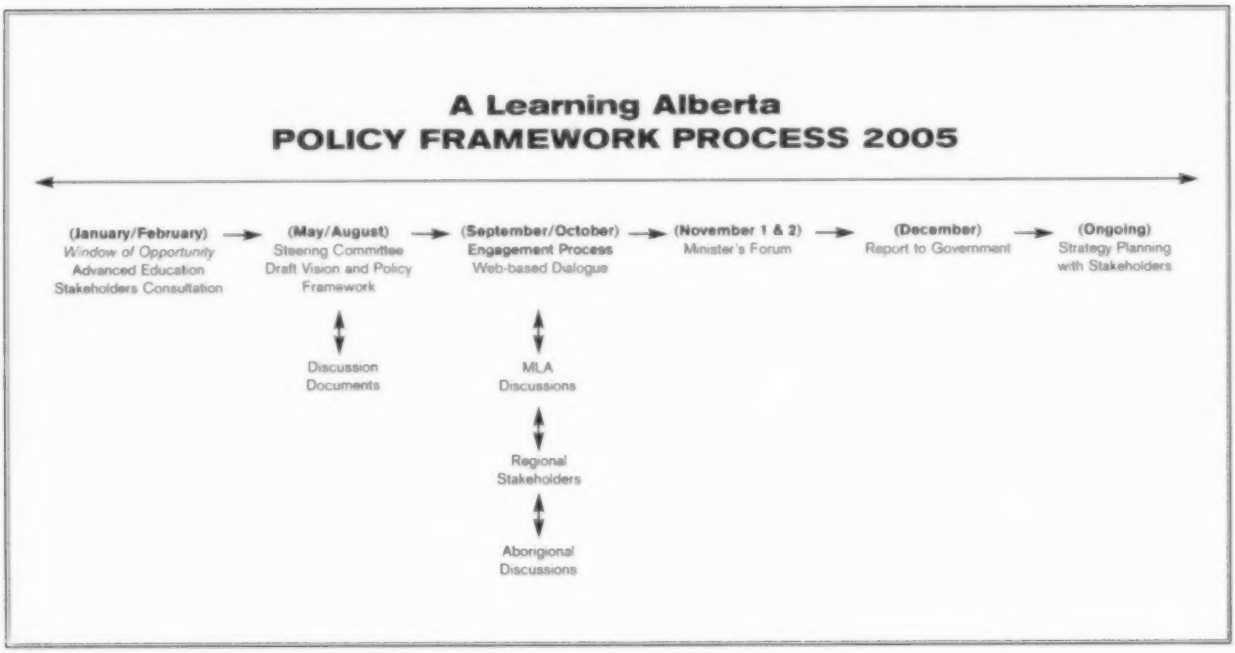
A Learning Alberta
POLICY FRAMEWORK PROCESS 2005
(January/February)
Window of Opportunity
Advanced Education
Stakeholders Consultation
(May/August)
Steering Committee
Draft Vision and Policy
Framework
(September/October)
Engagement Process
Web-based Dialogue
(November 1 & 2)
Minister's Forum
(December)
Report to Government
(Ongoing)
Strategy Planning
with Stakeholders
Discussion
Documents
MLA
Discussions
Regional
Stakeholders
Aboriginal
Discussions

These opportunities for discussion will enable Albertans to help shape the directions and ideas of the ***A Learning Alberta Policy Framework.*** Key themes from all of these channels of discussion will be reported to the **Minister's Forum.**

Discussion Papers

The Steering Committee's work has also produced a series of discussion papers that are being used as background for the policy framework development. These seven *A Learning Alberta* papers focus on:

- Investing in Alberta's Advanced Education System
- Ensuring Affordability in Alberta's Advanced Education System
- Advanced Education in Rural Alberta: Challenges and Opportunities
- Increasing Accessibility to Advanced Education for Under-Represented Albertans
- Fostering Innovation in Alberta
- Quality in Alberta's Advanced Education System
- Shaping the Future Direction of the Advanced Education System

These papers are available at www.alearningalberta.gov.ab.ca

Minister's Forum – November 1 and 2

A **Minister's Forum** will invite input on the policy framework from all areas of the advanced education sector, including faculty, students groups, community learning resources, literacy groups, Aboriginal and immigrant groups, business, industry, apprenticeship and industry training stakeholders, and many others.

The end product will provide recommendations to the Minister on a vision for Alberta's advanced education system in the 21st century, supported by ***A Learning Alberta Policy Framework***. Innovative ideas on how best to make that vision a reality will be encouraged throughout the process.

The Key to Alberta's Future

- A Knowledge-Based Economy

As Alberta celebrates its centennial, the attention of its people is divided. On the one hand, Albertans are peering into history, appreciating the struggles of the province's pioneers, noting their achievements and honouring their legacy. On the other hand, Albertans are imagining the province's future, anticipating the promise of an even better tomorrow.

Alberta entered its first century primarily rural. Now it enters its second century predominantly urban. A society whose origins in 1905 were largely Aboriginal or European is now globally diverse. And perhaps most significantly, a territory which was once an isolated frontier finds itself at the centre of a new geo-political context where it must attract capital from around the world, compete globally and acknowledge and respond to global economic shifts, such as the rise of the growing Asian economies.

Alberta faces unique opportunities and risks and must be ready to respond:

- The Province is a secure source of energy supply in an increasingly unstable world, with significant reserves of oil, clean coal and natural gas. Alberta's traditional commodity sectors are mature and technologically sophisticated, however commodity prices are highly cyclical and the majority of our energy resources are non-renewable.
- Alberta must sustain a globally competitive economy for the future - one that adds value across both its traditional resource sectors and new and emerging sectors such as bio-technology, environmental and information technologies and value-added manufacturing.
- Alberta leads the country in growth and prosperity, but with that growth comes challenges, including:
    - Attracting, retaining and developing the human capital needed to sustain growth.
    - Providing the social and physical infrastructure needed to support growth.
    - Creating opportunities for underrepresented groups to share in and contribute to the province's prosperity.
    - Taking advantage of our province's rural strengths and opportunities.
    - Ensuring the environment is protected under the pressures of growth.
    - Developing the right strategies and policies to ensure a secure and prosperous future.

In making advanced education a top priority of his government, Premier Klein has said that merely being good is not enough for Albertans. We must develop a great system of advanced learning in order for the province and its people to meet their full potential.

Advanced Education Minister Dave Hancock is conducting this policy framework on the basis of a number of underlying beliefs:

- Albertans can choose their future.
- Alberta must develop, attract and retain people who have the skills required by a knowledge-based economy.
- There must be a place for every Albertan who wants to advance his or her education.
- Albertans should be inspired to take advantage of the opportunity to improve themselves and their lives.
- A learning culture includes more than traditional learning institutions and systems. It includes learners, their families and communities, and a range of local and provincial learning partners, both public and private.
- Alberta can develop a learning society that is on the leading edge of advanced learning anywhere in the world – and do it in a way that makes sure it is affordable and accessible.

The importance of advanced education to the creation of a healthy, prosperous and progressive society cannot be overstated. It is essential to Alberta's economic prospects, to its social wellbeing and to the quality of the lives of every Albertan.

A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR *A LEARNING ALBERTA*

The Policy Framework outlined below presents four key elements for discussion with Albertans.

- A Vision and Mission for *A Learning Alberta.*
- Key policy challenges that must be addressed to achieve this vision.
- Core policy principles that will drive direction and decisions.
- The foundations, or platforms, that will guide policy directions in the years ahead.

A Policy Framework for *A Learning Alberta*

Vision Mission	Policy Challenges	Policy Principles **Accessible** **Affordable** **Quality**	Policy Foundations **Learner-Centred** **Community-Based** **Innovation/Excellence**

Vision:

A Learning Alberta:
Alberta is a province where all citizens have access to higher learning opportunities and where they are inspired to reach their full potential. Alberta aggressively seizes its future opportunities by leveraging the diverse skills, talents and imaginations of its citizens.

Most of all, Alberta is a true learning province, a place where advanced education and lifelong learning are cornerstones of a healthy, prosperous and progressive society.

Mission:

To develop a learning partnership in Alberta between society and the individual in which there is shared responsibility and benefits together with shared investment and knowledge.

Alberta's Policy Challenges:

When Alberta entered the "oil boom" of the mid-1970s, the response of government was to provide a wide range of public programs and services. By the 1990s, however, it had become obvious that government alone cannot meet the growing needs of Albertans on a sustainable basis. To achieve sustainability, the role of government needed to become more complementary – to support and strengthen (not replace) the roles of individuals, families, communities, markets and businesses in our society.

Today, there are unique challenges and opportunities facing public policy makers in Alberta. Shifts in policy priorities have occurred over the last decade in Alberta and they continue to evolve. The *A Learning Alberta Policy Framework* will reflect a number of the emerging policy shifts, including:

- A greater integration of economic and social policy. Traditionally, Alberta has looked at these sectors quite distinctly.
- Recognition in key strategies that learning and education are fundamental sources of well-being and opportunity for citizens. In the past, policy in Alberta has focused primarily on income and employment opportunities.
- A rethinking of education spending - as a critical investment in the future rather than an immediate expenditure.
- The recognition that the capacity of communities can be extended significantly when government, business and communities work together for a shared social benefit.
- A shift in emphasis from *management accountability* (a focus by the administration on efficiency and economy) to an emphasis on policy accountability (a focus by the leadership on effectiveness and equity).
- Refocusing and tracking *outcomes* of policy, programs and expenditure rather than measuring inputs and outputs.
- Breaking down the "silos" among sectors, industries, providers and government departments. Integrating policies, planning and programs across areas of responsibility.
- Putting the experiences of the people and organizations impacted by policies at the centre of policy planning, rather than allowing government requirements and processes to drive policies and programs.

Policy Principles:

The following principles are fundamental to the *A Learning Alberta Policy Framework*. They reflect commitments to advanced education that must be imbedded and sustained throughout all aspects of the policy directions and decisions for the future. These principles are: **Accessibility, Affordability and Quality.**

Accessibility

Premier Ralph Klein has said he believes that anyone who wants to pursue post-secondary education in Alberta should be able to do so. Advanced Education Minister Dave Hancock has said that Albertans should be inspired to take advantage of all opportunities to improve themselves in whatever ways they want or need.

Key factors in ensuring access include:

- Removing barriers to participation in learning opportunities
- Ensuring easy and responsive transitions into advanced education for underrepresented groups, such as rural populations, Aboriginal people, immigrants, persons with disabilities, and adults with low basic skills.
- Policies and programs that meet the needs of non-traditional learners and non-traditional learning.
- Strengthening learning opportunities in rural communities by delivering education in new ways.
- Defining the role of technology in delivering learning opportunities.
- Defining the roles of public and private institutions, community providers and agencies and business in making learning opportunities available and accessible.

Affordability

Premier Klein has said that while education isn't free, it should be affordable.

Factors that affect affordability include:

- The costs that learners face in addition to tuition, such as books, technology, housing, transportation.
- The rate and frequency of tuition increases.

- The need for financial assistance to be flexible and responsive to learners' circumstances.

- Finding the appropriate balance between what individuals pay and what public dollars support in providing learning opportunities.

- Accessibility to educational opportunities outside of urban areas.

Quality

A high quality education system meets the needs of learners, society and the economy.

Key factors in ensuring quality include:

- Curriculum that reflects the changing needs of society and the economy and equips learners with relevant skills.
- Acknowledging that learning and literacy start in families, from a child's earliest experiences.
- The ability to attract and retain the best faculty to draw the best from our students.
- A high degree of cooperation and collaboration among the full spectrum of learning providers.
- Ensuring that the technology curriculum meets the changing needs of the workplace.
- Integrating technology into teaching in ways that support learners wherever they are.
- Encouraging centres of excellence in both learning and research that position Alberta to be globally competitive.
- Ensuring that the development and use of facilities and equipment supports innovation and excellence.

Policy Foundations:

The following Policy Foundations provide a framework for future policy directions and program decisions for advanced education in Alberta:

Learner-Centred
Community-Based
Innovation and Excellence

Characteristics of Learner-Centred Systems

- Equitable access to learning opportunities is assured for all learners.
- Learner opportunities respect and respond to learner choice. Programs adapt to the needs of learners and society.
- Learners have access to a wide array of tools (information, technology, counseling) to support informed decision-making about programs and career paths.
- Life-long learning opportunities are acknowledged throughout the system.
- The diversity of learners is recognized, including underrepresented populations.
- Supports are in place to ensure learners' success are effective and readily available.
- Policies and programs support credential achievement and easy transitions among learners' options (including transitions to and from work, and between basic education and post-secondary options).
- Learning options are affordable and acknowledge the costs and debt levels that learners face. Financial assistance is flexible, predictable and responsive to learners needs.
- Learning systems, programs and ways of delivering learning to students are culturally sensitive and responsive.

Characteristics of Community-Based Learning Opportunities

- Advanced learning opportunities contribute to the overall quality of life and vibrancy of communities.
- Policies, programs and practices encourage a community-focused approach to advanced learning.
- Planning for advanced learning is collaborative. It engages multiple sectors and stakeholders within and across communities of interest.
- Communities collaborate in "access to learning" planning that considers the contributions of all providers, whether public or private institutions, non-profit or community agencies and resource providers.
- Institutions, schools, community organizations and industry collaborate in the development of programs and joint facility use.
- SuperNet and technology are used effectively to expand access.
  The digital library, digital curricula and eCampus Alberta concepts are broadened.

- There are ways to acknowledge the costs borne by rural learners when determining financial support.

- The role that regional advanced learning providers play in local economic development and the development of community capacity is recognized and supported.

Characteristics of a Focus on Innovation and Excellence

- Policy, programs and investment reflect the fact that people are the foundation for innovation and creativity and that the generation of knowledge will drive economic success.

- The advanced learning system looks outward and has a strategic international focus.

- Recognition that knowledge transfer and application is growing at a rapid rate.

- Curriculum is relevant for globally competitive graduates/business/industry.

- Tax and other incentives encourage research within the private sector.

- There is an alignment of international education efforts with immigration and economic development strategies. Strategic approaches are in place to attract and retain immigrants and foreign students to Alberta.

- Technology and equipment are in place to support research.

- Centres of excellence in research and instruction have been developed.

- Attracting and keeping quality researchers and students in Alberta is a priority.

- Applied research within college and technical institutes sector is supported by both the private and public sectors.

- There is strategic alignment of resources (facilities, equipment, technology, human resources) across multiple partners.

- The strength of a diverse and international student base is recognized in many ways: exchange programs, bridging programs for immigrant students and teachers, and supports for second languages, integration, settlement and employment.

- Scholarships are a key tool to support the attainment of excellence and the attraction and retention of students.

- Everyone involved in the learning system in Alberta understands, and is focused on, a shared vision.

Policy Outcomes

Here is a preliminary list of outcomes from A Learning Alberta Policy Framework:

- Alberta's advanced education is world class, and it incorporates global and international perspectives.
- Advanced education is viewed as an investment in people and as a benefit to society.
- Advanced education opportunities and methods of delivery are responsive and learner-centred.
- Alberta's advanced education system is community-based, so that communities have the capacity to expand learning opportunities.
- All Albertans have equitable advanced learning opportunities and are inspired to achieve their potential.
- All Albertans obtain an education that permits them to participate fully in life and society
- Individuals, families, employers and institutions all have a role to play in advancing learning and see a need to work together to achieve shared goals.
- Albertans are knowledge generators and knowledge consumers

Quality Measures:

- Alberta has strong participation and educational attainment rates.
- Alberta's ratio of graduate to undergraduate students is improved.
- Alberta leads other provinces in literacy rates.
- Alberta's capacity to produce its own educators is enhanced.
- Alberta is a leader in sponsored research in the natural/physical sciences as well as social science research.

Discussion Questions – *A Learning Alberta*

VISION – *A Learning Alberta*

What do you think are the most essential components of A Learning Alberta?

POLICY PRINCIPLES

Looking at the three fundamental principles:

Are these the right principles to drive future directions and decisions in advanced learning?

What do you think is essential in order to ensure:

Access?
Quality?
Affordability?

POLICY FOUNDATIONS

Looking at these Policy Foundations:

Are these the right foundations to create A Learning Alberta?

What would you change, delete or add?

Learner-Centred

What do you think is most necessary to ensure Alberta's advanced learning system is learner-centred?

Community-Based

What do you think is most necessary to ensure Alberta's advanced learning system is community-based?

Innovation and Excellence

What do you think is most necessary to ensure Alberta's advanced learning system is innovative and excellent?

POLICY OUTCOMES/QUALITY MEASURES

What would you add, change or delete from this preliminary list of Policy Outcomes?

What would you add, change or delete on this list of Quality Measures?

FINAL WORDS

What final thoughts, issues or ideas would you like to provide to the Steering Committee and the Minister about the future of advanced learning in Alberta?

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